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THE BOOK OF THE MONTH

RELIGIOUS IDEAS OF THE HEBREWS

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The great number of books dealing with the religion of Israel attests the interest in the subject on the part of the general public. This latest addition¹ to the number is addressed specifically to "the preacher and general Bible student." It is more solid and serious in its method of treatment than most books aimed at that particular group. The point of view throughout is professedly historical, but the method of presentation is topical. Eight chapters, for example, deal with the God-idea, a chapter being devoted to each of the following aspects of that idea: personality, unity, spirituality, power, holiness, righteousness, love, and angels. This method has of course obvious advantages of a practical sort. It is just as clear that it presents certain disadvantages. It is inevitable that it should fail to be fully historical in that it concentrates attention upon ideas as such and largely loses sight of the people and circumstances that produced them. The result is that this book reads too much like a treatise on systematic theology and fails to present a concrete and living impression of the religion of Israel as it really was. What we get here is an abstract, idealistic interpretation rather than historical reality.

If closer contact with history had been maintained throughout, the author would have been saved from making some statements that will not bear examination. It will hardly do nowadays to say that Yahweh in early Israel had no feminine counterpart (pp. 74 f.). The Anath-Yahweh, etc., of

the Assuan Papyri was hardly a late or foreign addition to the Hebrew pantheon. Not a reference to the Assuan Papyri is found in this volume. The theory that the superiority of Yahwism to the religions round about was due to the more passionate devotion that must have characterized his worship will hardly furnish the desired explanation. The religion of Chemosh was not lacking in passionate devotion if human sacrifice is any test of such passion. As a matter of fact we know too little of Chemosh, Milcom, *et al.*, to make comparisons of this sort with safety. It is not quite accurate to say that monotheism originated in Israel (p. 39) and distinctly to imply that it was not known prior thereto in Egypt or Babylonia, for, as is well known, monotheistic speculation appeared in the Valley of the Nile many centuries before the days of the Hebrew prophets. Nor is it correct to delay the origin of the pronunciation "Jehovah" until the beginning of the Reformation in Europe (p. 55). That form (or what is almost identically that form) is known to have occurred as early at least as 1303 A.D. In what is on the whole a good presentation of the Hebrew thought about life after death some facts are not given sufficient weight. Prophetic Yahwism did, of course, oppose ancestor worship and necromancy, but it never opposed the view that life persisted after death. It was rather so much concerned with national interests that it had practically no time or energy for the

¹ *The Religious Teaching of the Old Testament.* By A. C. Knudson. New York: Abingdon Press, 1918. Pp. 416. \$2.50.

eschatology of the individual. The mourning rites and customs prove clearly that the people in general believed in the persistence of life after death, and though certain philosophically minded individuals and groups from time to time denied this belief, it nevertheless persisted and took on richer and richer content. The stories of resuscitation at the hands of Elijah and Elisha show that even by prophetic writers the spirit was thought of as surviving. The use of resurrection as a figure by the prophet Ezekiel in his Vision of Dry Bones shows that it was a common idea among his contemporaries. If he had not taken for granted their familiarity with the thought of the resurrection of individuals he would never have used said resurrection as a symbol of the resurrection of the nation.

Some trenchant criticisms of the Kenite hypothesis as to the origin of ethical Yahwism are offered (p. 158). As a matter of

experience it may be noted further that the change of gods by a people nowhere else in the ancient world wrought such ethical wonders as it is supposed to have done with the Hebrews. The Kenite hypothesis thus solves our problem by raising another in its place. The rise and development of ethical religion in Israel was a social phenomenon into the production of which went many converging lines of influence. No single agency or influence can account for so complex a thing as the growth of ethics.

Any layman or minister having the intellectual energy to hold himself to a serious piece of reading will find Professor Knudson's book full of interest and unusually stimulating to thought. Those having but a vague and inchoate sense of the significance of the modern interpretation of the Old Testament will find here a reconstruction of Hebrew religion that will be illuminating and informing.

BOOK NOTICES

Positive Protestantism. A concise statement of the historical origins, the positive affirmations, and the present position of Protestantism. By A. Augustine Hobson. Philadelphia: Griffith and Rowland Press, 1917. Pp. xii+313. \$1.25.

This volume presents in popular form the whence, what, and whither of Protestantism. It is at once an exposition and a defense of Protestant positions, and will be found useful as a guide-book in the hands of inquirers seeking to understand the religious movements growing out of the Reformation. The opening chapters deal with the origins of Protestantism. The early history of Christianity is traced, and attention is called to the drifts in life and thought which carried the church away from the ideals of primitive Christianity into ritualism, priestcraft, and the papacy.

A cursory survey of the Renaissance period prepares the way for a consideration of the Protestant movement of the sixteenth century; Lutheranism, culminating at last in a new scholasticism; the Calvinistic movement with

its inherent democracy and its emphasis on doctrine; Anabaptism, with its emphasis upon the Scriptures, freedom of conscience, and the separation of church and state. Over against all these, as a foil, is the Counter-Reformation.

Following this historical survey the author formulates the positive affirmations of Protestantism, viz., justification by faith, and religion conceived as a temper of soul rooted in a life of trust and producing the Christian character. Catholicism, on the contrary, is legalistic, sacramental, dogmatic, authoritative, infallible, weighted down with anachronisms; monasticism, veneration of saints and images, the cult of Mary, and indulgences.

The closing chapters treat of present-day Protestantism, its divisions and their causes, the essential unity and growing co-operation of Protestantism in America, and finally its future prospects as judged by its material growth, its educational efficiency, and its defense of freedom and democracy. In contrast to a reactionary Catholicism, Protestantism has identified itself with the spirit of the modern world.